



# ***Iowa Outdoors***

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**[www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)**

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**Due to power outages in eastern Iowa, the fishing report for certain areas are unavailable.**

**Feb. 27, 2007**

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## **MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND CAMPSITES FILLING QUICKLY**

DES MOINES – Don't let that 10 inches of new snow and below freezing temperatures fool you, camping season is here. The Memorial Day weekend is less than three months away and campers are snapping up state park campsites through the Iowa Department of Natural Resources campsite reservation system.

“After only one season, campers have figured out the reservation system and are using it to secure their favorite campsites for our busy weekends,” said Kevin Szcodronski, chief of the Iowa DNR's state parks bureau. As of Monday, nearly half of the reservable electrical sites are taken for the Memorial Day weekend.

Each state park with a campground has equal number of electric and non electric campsites available through the reservation system and available on a first come, first serve basis. Visitors to [www.reserveiaparks.com](http://www.reserveiaparks.com) can search the state based on campground criteria they select. Each site has a description, photo and if it is reservable or not.

“We started seeing this last year, where a number of the reservable sites at our busier parks were taken for holiday weekends as soon as they entered the three month

window, so I guess this is not much of a surprise,” Szcodronski said. “What is a surprise is the number of sites that are taken for Memorial Day Weekend. That tells me campers know the system and are using it the way it was intended.”

**For more information, contact Szcodronski at 515-281-8674**

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[Graphic illustration available electronically]

## **DEALING WITH STORM DAMAGED TREES**

Dealing with storm damaged trees involves more than just clean up – it involves personal safety and wise pruning techniques to protect your trees.

“The number one priority in dealing with storm clean up has to be personal safety,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau and certified arborist. “Too often people underestimate the danger, whether from fallen power lines to the weight of the branches to the use of chain and pruning saws resulting in dangerous situations that often lead to a trip to the emergency room.”

State foresters are recommending to homeowners with tree damage from the latest round of ice and snow, to make sure no power lines are present in dealing with downed limbs. If power lines are present, stay away and contact your utility company right away.

“If no power lines are present, storm clean up must prioritize getting access to your home, clearing limbs from your car or property using chain saws, pole pruners and pruning saws. In no sense should homeowners climb into a tree, get on a ladder or add additional weight to already damaged limbs to prune. Stay on the ground,” Walkowiak said. “The best advice I can offer when dealing with trees is, if the job requires you to leave the ground or the job is bigger than the equipment you have, contact a professional.

“We also advise people to wear protective clothing from chain saw chaps and hard hats, to leather gloves and eye protection,” he said.

Homeowners should try to protect the branch collars of damaged limbs by using a three step method of undercutting to reduce stress, then removing the weight of the branch and then pruning to protect the branch collars.

“Improper pruning can make a lasting damage to the life of the tree,” he said.

For more information on storm damaged trees, go to your local ISU County Extension Office and request SUL- Managing Storm Damaged Trees or visit <http://www.ag.iastate.edu/departments/forestry/publications/urban.html>.

**For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.**

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## **ADDED SNOWFALL MAKES EXCELLENT CONDITION FOR BURNING BRUSH PILES**

AMES – Landowners looking for a safe way to burn large woody long burning piles of slash should take advantage of the recent snowfall. Now is a great time to burn those large piles of brush.

“Burning with good fire breaks such as snow is a perfect time to remove those large brush piles that you see across Iowa,” said Ryan Schlater, fire specialist with the Iowa DNR. “The chance of an escape fire on big, heavy 1,000 hour fuels such as large limbs is the least during the winter months with snow on the ground. Escapes can happen and caution should be used, but overall the risk is reduced.”

Landowners may have a tough time starting the piles on fire. The use of propane wand torches, sold at most farm and home type of stores, will aid in the burning. Small propane torches such as those used for soldering are too small to get large piles going. The larger 20-pound grill-type propane cylinders are used with the torches to provide ample propane to get the piles started.

“Propane torches allow a lot of heat to be put on the fuel, in this case large limbs and brush piles, for a longer time. Typical drip torches, using a mix of diesel and gasoline, are good for lighting prairie and woodland burns in the spring, summer and fall burns, but lack the sustained heat needed to light brush piles,” Schlater said.

Safety is a major concern as well when lighting brush piles, or doing any burning. Although there is snow on the ground, fire is a dangerous tool used in land management. Proper training in the use of all fire should be gained before anyone gets too involved in burning.

**For more information, contact Ryan Schlater or any fire staff at 515-233-1161.**

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## **RESCUE IOWA PRAIRIES AND CELEBRATE EARTH DAY**

Iowa volunteers are invited to “rescue” prairies throughout the state to celebrate Earth Day #37. This is the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Prairie Rescue Event.

Volunteers of all ages will help restore prairie at more than 20 sites throughout Iowa. Tasks vary by site and range from cutting out invasive brush to hand-planting native seed.

Not only is citizen involvement beneficial to the community, it is crucial for the land upon which the people live. More than 150 years ago, prairies covered 80 percent of the land in Iowa. Today only 0.1 percent of native Iowa prairies remain. In order to save what is left, humans must now manage these prairies by removing invasive species and performing other jobs once handled naturally by prairie wildfires and grazing bison or elk.

In the words of Aldo Leopold, “The first precaution of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the parts.” The Prairie Rescue gives Iowans an opportunity to help save the remaining pieces of our prairies.

Children and adults, individuals and groups can get involved at one of many Prairie Rescue sites across the state. Each site is sponsored by public and private conservation groups, such as the Iowa Prairie Network, Loess Hills Preservation Society, several Iowa County Conservation Boards, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

If you are interested in hosting a Prairie Rescue Event, contact Whitney Davis at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at (515) 281-6271 or [Whitney.Davis@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Whitney.Davis@dnr.state.ia.us) prior to March 8. For a listing of Iowa 2007 Spring Prairie Rescue sights, visit the Prairie Rescue website at [www.inhf.org/rescue2007.htm](http://www.inhf.org/rescue2007.htm) beginning in mid-March.

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## **ROBINS N BLUEBIRDS...EARLY SPRING? NO, MILD WINTER**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Okay, it's been a pretty mild winter—notwithstanding three weeks of bitter cold and snow that are finally loosening their grip.

But now; flocks of robins? Flashing bluebirds? Hungry cedar waxwings? All over Iowa, sightings are being logged on birder websites or just passed word-of-mouth: herons on the Mississippi River, dozens of waterfowl, gulls, trumpeter (and tundra) swans.

A week ago, I noticed 100 or so birds concentrated in the neighbor's driveway, picking up road sand for grit. Nearly all were robins. Monday afternoon, in downtown Iowa City, a half dozen cedar waxwings competed with twice as many robins for the fruit

remaining on a crabapple tree. The day before, three bluebirds painted streaks of sky-blue and orange against the brown and white backdrop on Lake Macbride's south shore.

So, is spring migration underway early?

Hardly. It's more likely a delayed *fall* migration for some of those species that seem out of the ordinary in a snowy February. "In early January, we were seeing thousands of robins. On January 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>, there were 2,500 tallied at Ledges State Park," reports Bruce Ehresman, wildlife diversity biologist for the Department of Natural Resources, in Boone. "We had several other large invasions of robins reported last month. They were most likely coming *down from the north*, ahead of that cold front."

It's not exclusively science. Ehresman talked with a friend near Duluth three weeks ago and learned that he had not even shoveled snow yet. That is about the time the hammer came down in the form of subzero temperatures and snow. "Remember, birds do not go any further south than they have to," underscores Ehresman. "It's likely that a lot of the birds around here now just moved in. This is mild, considering where they left."

Though seen as a symbol of spring, some robins stick around all winter. Likewise, it's not rare to see bluebirds throughout an Iowa winter. And right about now, male bluebirds which *did* migrate are beginning to show up, staking out territories for the upcoming nesting season.

So what are they eating? Think of robins and you picture them crow-hopping through the backyard, yanking worms out of the turf or perched in a cherry tree, helping to pick it clean. Bluebirds feed heavily on larvae and insects. But it's not exactly fruit-and-bug season.

"They're feeding on cockspur hawthorn, prairie crabapples. It's not uncommon to see robins through the winter," says Brad Friedhof, naturalist with the Johnson County Conservation Department. "There are always food sources for cedar waxwings (and other species) which come back early; even things like arbor vitae."

ISU Extension wildlife specialist Jim Pease has fielded inquiries from across the state. "Look at the Christmas bird counts. We had some robins sticking around even then. These (new flocks) are from the north. They stuck around up there until winter finally came," says Pease. "As long as there is fruit around; crabapple, high bush cranberry, they'll be okay."

### **Eagles, Owls Get Down to (Nesting) Business**

Some of those songbirds might have us wondering whether they're coming or going. However, eagles, owls and other raptors are getting down to business. For many, nesting season is here.

“Great horned owls are incubating eggs right now,” points out Bruce Ehresman, DNR wildlife diversity biologist. “Bald eagles have been building nests for a couple weeks or so. They are real close to laying eggs.” Ehresman says red-tailed hawks are seen now paired up, on branches; or hauling sticks to nests. Barred owls are setting up territories now, as well.

Winter continues for most wildlife species, but for lots of local raptors, ‘spring has sprung.’

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## **TREES AND SHRUBS FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT AVAILABLE FOR SPRING**

AMES - Habitat created by trees and shrubs is critical to wildlife survival in Iowa. Though one tree gives some benefits, a diverse planting of trees and shrubs give the greatest benefit to the most wildlife.

In response to the call to expand wildlife habitat plantings, the State Forest Nursery, at Ames, is offering low cost Wildlife and Songbird packets of conservation trees and shrubs for citizens to plant this spring.

The Songbird Packet consists of 20 trees and shrub bareroot seedlings and is ideal for an area in the yard to devote to wildlife. The Songbird Packet sells for \$20, which includes shipping, and consists of two bur oaks, two white pine, four wild plum, four chokecherry, four gray dogwoods and four serviceberry plants. The bareroot seedlings are 8 to 24 inches tall. This Songbird Packet was developed in cooperation with Audubon Iowa.

A Create A Wildlife packet is for landowners with one to five acres who can create their own specialty packet consisting of up to up to four different species in units of 50 for a total of 200 trees and shrubs. This packet costs \$90.

Also available is a special Turkey Packet developed in cooperation with the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation that contains 50 bur oak, 50 red oak, 50 pin oak and 50 gray dogwood. A special Pheasant Packet developed in cooperation with Iowa Pheasants Forever contains 50 redcedar, 50 wild plum, 50 ninebark and 50 gray dogwood. Finally, a special Quail Packet contains 100 wild plum and 100 gray dogwoods.

To place an order, contact the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477 M-F 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or go to [www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/](http://www.iowadnr.gov/forestry/). Credit cards are accepted. Packets with planting instruction will be delivered until May 31.

For more information, contact Walkowiak, at 515-242-5966 or [john.walkowiak@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:john.walkowiak@dnr.state.ia.us).

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## ***IOWA FISHING REPORT***

[www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)

February 27, 2007

For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

### **Southeast**

**Lake Macbride** (Johnson): Small bluegills continue to be plentiful. Some anglers are also catching small crappies. The larger crappies remain hard to find.

**Diamond Lake** (Poweshiek): Good numbers of average sized bluegills are being caught around any type of structure. Some suspending crappies are also being caught after dark. Remember that minnows are not allowed here.

**Hannen Lake** (Benton): Mixed bags of crappies and bluegills have been coming off the brush. More crappies are showing up toward the dam end of the lake, while the bluegills are in the middle to upper end of the lake.

**Lake Rathbun** (Appanoose): Rain over the weekend is weakening ice in some areas of the lake. The ice around the shoreline has also started to deteriorate. Use caution if venturing out.

**Lake Wapello** (Davis): Ice around the shoreline has started to deteriorate making getting on the ice difficult. Use caution if venturing out.

**Lake Sugema** (Van Buren): With the rains and warmer temperatures last week, the ice has started to deteriorate. Use caution.

**Lake Miami** (Monroe): With the rains and warmer temperatures last week, the ice has started to deteriorate. Use caution.

**For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.**

### **Southwest**

**Don Williams** (Boone): Ice condition is good. Nice crappies and bluegills are being caught on jigs tipped with wax worms.

**Hickory Grove** (Story): Ice condition is good. Medium-sized bluegills are being caught on wax worms and 7 to 9-inch crappies are being caught on minnows at dusk. Fishing has slowed down somewhat.

**Banner Lakes at Summerset Park** (Warren): Ice condition is good. The north lake is in the process of being renovated, so there are no fish in this lake. A few trout from the last stocking may still be lurking in the south lake. Don't forget your trout stamp.

**Big Creek** (Polk): Ice condition is good. The best fishing has been at dusk. Some walleyes are hitting on jigs tipped with minnows. Most fish are in the 10 to 14-inch range, but the occasional keeper can be landed. Try fishing around structure.

**Lost Lake** (Polk): Ice condition is good. Crappie and bluegills are still biting. The bite is finicky so simplify and size down your gear.

**Rock Creek** (Jasper): Ice conditions may not be suitable. The edges of the lake are soft in places.

**Easter Lake** (Polk): Ice may not be suitable. Some parts of the lake have opened up.

**Ada Haden** (Story): Fishing has been slow, but some nice crappies are now being caught.

**Contact: Ben Dodd (515) 432-2823, Ext.108, for information on the above area lakes. For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.**

**The following report on ice conditions is from the southwest area lakes and ponds located in the Mount Ayr and the Cold Springs districts.**

Recent rains and snow melt have degraded ice conditions on most water bodies. Many farm ponds and small lakes have large areas of open water with little or very poor ice remaining. Medium sized lakes may not be accessible from shore because run-off has increased their water level and open water would probably occur near shore. Ice strength in the middle portions of these lakes may or may not be safe. Ice conditions will vary widely so call for the most recent conditions.

**Fogle** (Ringgold): Bluegills and a few crappies are being caught in deeper water near structure with wax worms and minnows. Be sure to check ice conditions.

**Three Mile** (Union): Good numbers of bluegills are being caught next to deep structure on wax worms. Crappies seem to be harder to find, but a few crappies are also being caught next to deep structure. Be sure to check ice conditions.

**Green Valley** (Union): Few reports were given on Green Valley, but reports from the few that are fishing Green Valley are catching a few bluegills and crappies using wax worms and minnows in deeper water. Be sure to check ice conditions.

**Icaria** (Adams): A few nice bluegills and crappies are being caught with wax worms and minnows. Best locations are near deep water structure, next to the drop in the channel, and in the deep flats of the east end. Be sure to check ice conditions.

**Contact: Gary Sobotka (641) 464-3108 for information on the above area lakes. For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.**

**Orient** (Adair): Fishing is fair for 8-inch bluegill and 8 to 10-inch crappie.

**Greenfield** (Adair): Fishing is slow for 8-inch bluegill. Teardrops tipped with a wax worm have been effective. A few crappies are being caught in evenings using minnows.

**Mormon Trail** (Adair): Fishing has been slow for bluegill and crappies.

**Nodaway** (Adair): Bluegills are fair using teardrops tipped with wax worms.

**Meadow** (Adair): A few crappies are being caught in brush piles using minnows. Bluegills are fair using wax worms.



**Anita** (Cass): No report of fishing. Anita has a good population of 7-inch bluegill.

**Manawa** (Pottawattamie): A few wipers are being caught using large minnows on east side of the lake. Crappie fishing is fair on west side around Boy Scout Island. Try jigs tipped with small minnows.

**DeSoto Bend** (Harrison): Crappies are fair using jigs tipped with minnows around sunken brush piles on east side of lake.

**Prairie Rose** (Shelby): Fishing is slow. A few crappies are being caught with minnows.

**Willow** (Harrison): A few bluegills are being caught on tear drops tipped with wax worms.

**Contact: Bryan Hayes (712) 769-2587 for information on the above area lakes. For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.**

### **Northwest**

**Spirit Lake** (Dickinson): Fishing has been slow over most of the lake, with a few anglers are catching perch off of Crandall's Beach. Look for northern pike fishing to pick up in the next couple weeks around Hales Slough and bluegill fishing in Angler's Bay.

**West Okoboji** (Dickinson): Little Miller's Bay is producing some nice bluegills. Wax worms or plastics tipped on horizontal ice jigs work best. An occasional crappie and northern pike is also being caught. Wahpeton canals are producing bluegills too, but sorting is required. Spencer Beach and the reef between Eagle Point and Pocahontas Point are producing some nice perch. The best bite is in the morning. Fish are being caught in 10 to 15 feet of water

**Minnewashta** (Dickinson): Anglers are catching some nice bluegills around the reef on the south end.

**Center Lake** (Dickinson): Anglers are doing well on walleyes off the island and in front of the aerator shed. Jigging minnow type lures and minnows under slip bobbers are both good baits. Try fishing in 12 to 15 feet of water. Walleyes are ranging from 8 inches to more than 20 inches, but most fish are 14 to 15 inches.

**Clear Lake** (Cerro Gordo): Anglers are catching a yellow bass in the deep water around the Island and Dodges Point. Jigging spoons tipped with minnow heads are working the best. Walleye fishing has been slow. Anglers fishing the sunrise and sunset periods report some walleye action.

**Blue Pit** – Lester Milligan Park (Cerro Gordo): The third stocking (1,500 trout) took place on Feb. 9. Small jigs and wax worms fished just below the ice works best. Trout seem to be near shore in the early morning and evening hours.

**Storm Lake** (Buena Vista): Some walleyes are being taken on live minnows or jigging spoons tipped with minnow head. The north shore, Frank Starr Park and the mouth of the marina have all produced fish. Don't forget there is a 17 to 22-inch protected slot on walleye in Storm Lake.

**Crawford Creek** (Ida): Fishing is fair for crappie and bluegill on tear drops and wax worms.

**Arrowhead Lake** (Sac): Fishing is fair for yellow bass, channel catfish and bluegill on wax worms, wigglers and teardrops.

**For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.**

**Northeast**

**No reports**

**For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.**

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